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Devotional items and messages are seen at the base of a statue of St. John Paul II outside of Rome's Gemelli hospital March 19, 2025. (CNS/Pablo Esparza)

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Change can be frightening, but the Holy Spirit encourages the faithful to face their fears, follow Jesus' light and be "born again," Pope Francis said in a prepared text.

"If we do not accept to change, if we close ourselves up in inflexibility, in habits or our ways of thinking, we risk dying. Life resides in the capacity to change to find a new way to love," he said in the catechesis prepared for his general audience March 19.

During the Holy Year 2025, Francis' general audience talks have focused on "Jesus Christ our hope." Since he was hospitalized for treatment of bilateral pneumonia Feb. 14, the Vatican has continued to publish the texts prepared for his general audience each Wednesday.

After reflecting on Jesus' infancy and childhood, he wrote, "we will begin to contemplate some of the encounters narrated in the Gospels to understand the way Jesus gives hope."

The first reflection was dedicated to Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, a teacher and leader of the Jews, who visits Jesus at night.

This episode with Nicodemus, the pope's text said, "shows that it is possible to emerge from darkness and find the courage to follow Christ." That darkness can have symbolic meaning, he added, and refer to "the darkness of doubt" or when "we no longer understand what is happening in our lives and do not see clearly the way forward."

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Nicodemus seeks Jesus, the catechesis said, because he has sensed that he can illuminate this darkness in his heart.

"Nicodemus senses that something no longer works in his life. He feels the need to change, but he does not know where to begin," the text said. "This happens to all of us in some phases of life."

"Jesus speaks to Nicodemus of a new birth, which is not only possible but even necessary at certain moments in our journey," the text said.

"If we allow the Holy Spirit to generate new life in us, we will be born again. We will rediscover that life, which was perhaps fading in us," it said.

Nicodemus shows that change is possible, the pope's catechesis said, as he will be among those who go to Pilate to ask for Jesus' body.

Nicodemus no longer needs to stay in the night, the catechesis said. He comes to the light and is reborn.

"Changes sometimes frighten us," the text said. "At times we desire them, but on the other, we would prefer to remain in comfort. Therefore the Spirit encourages us to face these fears."

"Only by looking into the face of that which frightens us can we begin to be set free," the pope's message said.

This story appears in the **2025 Holy Year** feature series. View the full series.